

address issues related to Populist and Republican goals regarding business and agriculture. Thus, a new strategy emerged for the 1894 election in which two entirely different groups would work together for a common cause. Fusion, as this merger came to be called, was unique in national politics and was not embraced by the national Republican or Populist parties. Further complication the merger was that not all members of the two parties within the state endorsed the practice either.⁶

Before fusion of the two parties could be achieved, differences between the two groups on a variety of issues had to be addressed. Leadership within each party acknowledged that the only way to achieve victory was to set aside differences, particularly those concerning racial matters. The two organizations featured similar platforms regarding election reform, increased local governmental authority, and additional support for public schools, thereby creating an easy policy fit for the merger. Likely Fusionists saw that the 1894 election had the potential to fill the General Assembly with Populists and Republicans, who would, in return, appoint like-minded individuals to the national Senate. Therefore, although not a gubernatorial or

presidential election, success in 1894 was seen as pivotal for Fusionists.⁷

Early Fusion in Wilmington

Just as Wilmington and New Hanover County experienced problems during the statewide election crises of earlier decades, the 1894 election spurred even further troubles in the region. The Democratic Party was split into factions—the Reformers and Regulars—that failed to reconcile differences. State Democratic Party leaders were brought in to mediate, albeit unsuccessfully. The Republican Party, also still undergoing internal dissent among many African American members as evidenced by Reverend Alridge's sermon, pulled itself together to win local election victories in 1894. The methods used by Russell as Republican leader in New Hanover County were less than clear at the time.

Russell and his supporters took a series of steps to achieve their goal using tactics not seen before in the Republican Party. First, candidate nominations were left to a committee instead of a convention, thereby preventing factionalism on a large scale.⁸ Once the committee chose its candidates, the Republicans waited until the last minute to make nominations known. Additionally, because they wanted to avoid the race issue, only one African American was put forward as a candidate. Among the most obtuse of their strategies was the nomination of only one candidate for the state house even though two positions were available for the county. The Democratic ticket featured two candidates from

⁶ For more on the problems of Fusion politics, see the following: Joseph Steelman, "Republican Party Strategists and the Issue of Fusion with Populists in North Carolina, 1893-1894" *North Carolina Historical Review* (July 1970); William Mabry, "Negro Suffrage and Fusion Rule in North Carolina" *North Carolina Historical Review* (Apr. 1935); Jeffrey Crow, "Fusion, Confusion, and Negroism: Schisms Among Negro Republicans in the North Carolina" *North Carolina Historical Review* (Oct. 1976) and Allen Trelease, "The Fusion Legislatures of 1895 and 1897: A Roll-Call Analysis of the North Carolina House of Representatives" *North Carolina Historical Review* (July 1980) and James L. Hunt, *Marion Butler and American Populism*. Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics*, 25-28; McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 390-1, 393.

⁷ Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics*, 34-37; McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 395.

⁸ The nomination committee was comprised of four whites (Daniel Russell, William Chadbourne, Flavel Foster, and George Z. French) and three blacks (Thomas C. Miller, Daniel L. Howard, and J. O. Nixon). McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 397.